



BRILL

Notes on Sacred Kingship in Central Asia

Author(s): Manabu Waida

Source: *Numen*, Vol. 23, Fasc. 3 (Dec., 1976), pp. 179-190

Published by: BRILL

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3269591>

Accessed: 10/09/2009 11:17

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=bap>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



BRILL is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Numen*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

NOTES ON SACRED KINGSHIP IN CENTRAL ASIA

BY

MANABU WAIDA

The University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

During the last two decades, we have seen the publication of many important works illuminating the religious conceptions and spiritual universe of the pastoral peoples in Central Asia. Of these, three deserve our special attention. In 1949, Leonardo Olschki attempted to decipher the mythical imagery of felt, the "coarse and poor material, which probably represents a first step in the history of early craftsmanship."¹) Mircea Eliade published his celebrated work on shamanism in 1951, enabling us to understand the meaning and structure of shamanism as a religious phenomenon in the general history of religions.²) Several years later, Jean-Paul Roux elucidated a motif of the heavenly origin of kingship in Central Asia by using a series of the Orkhon inscriptions.³) With the aid of these brilliant works, supplemented by other studies, it seems that we are now able to clarify and delineate the shamanistic structure of kingship in Central Asian history. For some time I have been engaged in collecting and analyzing the symbolism of the felt carpet, as it was used for the celebration of the enthronement ceremony. In this paper I would like to discuss the symbolism of the felt carpet with special reference to both shamanism and sacred kingship.

To simplify our research, we may start with the Eastern Turks

1) L. Olschki, *The Myth of Felt* (Berkeley, 1949), p. 47. I would like to thank Prof. Mircea Eliade for his kindness in drawing my attention to this excellent work.

2) M. Eliade, *Le Chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase* (Paris, 1951). The revised, enlarged edition of *Le Chamanisme* appeared in English as *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. by W. R. Trask (New York, 1964). I shall use this edition for quotation. Cf. also his "Recent Works on Shamanism," *History of Religions*, I, No. 1 (1961), 152-86.

3) J.-P. Roux, "L'Origine céleste de la souveraineté dans les inscriptions paléo-turques de Mongolie et de Sibérie," *La Regalità Sacra/The Sacral Kingship* (Leiden, 1959), pp. 231-41.

(T'u-chüeh) who dominated the Mongolian steppes for some two centuries from A.D. 552-744.⁴⁾ After discussing some of their folkways, the *Chou Shu*, Bk. 50, reports of the strange rituals performed when a new king, Khagan, was to accede to the royal throne:

Wenn ein neuer Herrscher gewählt wurde, trugen ihn die hohen Würdenträger aus seiner nächsten Umgebung in einer Filzdecke und drehten ihn dann der Sonne folgend (?) neunmal. Bei jeder Drehung verbeugten sich alle seine Untertanen vor ihm. Nach den (Drehung und) Verbeugungen halfen sie dem Oberhäuptling aufs Pferd und liessen ihn reiten. Daraufhin würgten sie ihn mit einem seidenen Tuch so, dass er gerade noch am Leben blieb. Dann lösten sie die Binde und fragten ihn hastig: "Wieviele Jahre wirst du unser Khagan sein?" Da der Khagan benommen war, konnte er die Zeitdauer nicht deutlich sagen. Darauf schlossen sie aus den Worten, die er (verworren) dabei ausgestossen hatte, auf Amtsdauer.⁵⁾

This text is then followed by a series of reports concerning the ranks, arms, penal laws, and funerals among the Eastern Turks.

Since the reports located before and after the information on the enthronement ceremony can be taken as authentic, we may suppose that the text in question is historically reliable and deserves our serious consideration. What is particularly striking in this mysterious story is the following motifs which are directly related with our subject matter: (1) the dialogue between the Khagan *in a perturbed state of mind* and his subjects; (2) the symbolic action of *turning round after the sun nine times*; and (3) the use of the *felt carpet*.

What interests us, in the first place, is the image of the Khagan who, *in a perturbed state of mind*, reveals to his subjects how many years he will rule his nation as king. To suggest our conclusion first, he reminds us of the shaman who, engaged in prophecy and divination in a state of ecstasy, transmits the will of the supernatural being to the people around him. As Professor Masao Mori rightly says, what the *Chou Shu* calls a "perturbed state of mind" is probably a Chinese way of referring to the unconscious and ecstatic state of mind, into which the new Khagan has fallen. According to this document, before the Khagan reveals the number of years he expects to rule, or, more precisely, before the heavenly divine being announces, through the

4) On the history of the Eastern Turks, see René Grousset, *L'Empire des Steppes* (4th edition, Paris, 1960), pp. 124ff.; Denis Sinor, "The Historical Role of the Turk Empire," *Cahiers d'Histoire Mondiale*, I (1953), 427-34. Cf. also Masao Mori, *Kodai Toruko minzokushi kenkyū*, I (Tokyo, 1967), especially pp. 3ff., 94ff.; Namio Egami, *Kiba minzoku kokka* (Tokyo, 1967), pp. 78ff.

5) Liu Mau-tsai, *Die chinesischen Nachrichten zur Geschichte der Ost-Türken* ("Göttinger Asiatische Forschungen," X, Wiesbaden, 1958), p. 8.

mouth of the new Khagan, how many years he is permitted to rule, his subjects throttle him by a piece of silken cloth almost to the point of strangulation. It is highly probable that they dared the throttling to help him fall into ecstasy as fast as possible. 6) This interpretation may be supported by the following information from the Samoyed:

After these preliminaries, the wizard (i.e. shaman) firmly tied round his neck a rope of reindeer skin four feet long, and gave the ends of it to two men who stood at the sides of the seat. When they had covered the shaman with a long garment, the Samoyeds who held the ends of the rope began to pull it in opposite directions. 7)

This information leads us to the supposition that the Eastern Turks believed the period the new Khagan was to rule as king should be determined by the will of the celestial being speaking through the mouth of the Khagan who, in a perturbed, namely, unconscious and ecstatic state of mind, functioned as a shaman.

The shamanic image of the Khagan is further confirmed by an interesting story on the Eastern Turks preserved in the *Chou Shu*, Bk. 50:

Nach dem Tode des No-tu-lu sollte einer der Söhne von den zehn Müttern zum Nachfolger gewählt werden. So versammelten sie sich unter einem grossen Baum und verabredeten, dass derjenige, der am höchsten am Baum emporspringen könne, Oberhaupt würde. Der Sohn von der geborenen A-shi-na war zwar noch jung, aber er sprang am höchsten. So machten ihn die anderen Söhne zu ihrem Oberhaupt. Er nannte sich nun A-hien Schad. 8)

We may be able to understand this story by taking into account the prominent role the tree plays in the shamanic ceremonies of Central and North Asia. Especially, when the famous Altaic horse sacrifice is observed for the Supreme Being Bai Ülgän, the shaman climbs up a tree, that is, he ascends symbolically to the highest heaven. 9) What

6) Cf. M. Mori, "Yūboku kokka ni okeru 'ōken shinju' to yū kangaye: Tokketsu minzoku no bawai" (*Rekishigaku Kenkyū*, No 133, 1948, pp. 22-34), p. 25, and his *Yūboku kiba minzoku kokka* (Tokyo, 1967), p. 89; Liu Mau-tsai, *Die chinesischen Nachrichten zur Geschichte der Ost-Türken*, pp. 459-60.

7) V. M. Mikhailowski, "Shamanism in Siberia and European Russia" (*Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, XXIV, 1894, pp. 62-100, 126-58), p. 140.

8) Liu, *Die chinesischen Nachrichten*, p. 6.

9) Wilhelm Radloff, *Aus Sibirien: lose Blätter aus dem Tagebuche eines reisenden Linguisten*, II (2 vols. in 1, Leipzig, 1884), pp. 20ff.; V. M. Mikhailowski, "Shamanism in Siberia and European Russia," pp. 74-78; Uno Harva, *Die religiösen Vorstellungen der altaischen Völker* (FF Communications No. 125, Helsinki, 1938), pp. 553-56; Wilhelm Schmidt, *Der Ursprung der Gottesidee: eine historisch-kritische und positive Studie*, IX (Münster, 1949), pp. 278-341; M. Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. 190-200.

particularly interests us is Mikhailowski's account of the shaman's tree climbing: "The more powerful the *kam* is, the higher he mounts in the celestial regions; there are some, but few, who can soar to the tenth, eleventh, twelfth and even higher." ¹⁰⁾ This account of the shaman's tree climbing seems to be morphologically related with the Eastern Turkic episode, which tells that "whosoever shall jump the highest up toward the tree shall be proclaimed chieftain." Let us also recall the fact that in the shaman's initiation ceremony he is required to "climb up the birch and, from the summit of the *jurta*, to call upon the gods and his kinsmen, the dead shamans." ¹¹⁾

Concerning the *turning round after the sun nine times*, it is reported that the Khagan's high officials carried him on a felt carpet and, according to Liu Mau-tsai's rendering, "drehten ihn dann der Sonne folgend (?) neunmal." Liu believes that turning round of the felt carpet must have been done very quickly in order to throw him into the increasingly perturbed state of mind, ¹²⁾ but he frankly confesses his difficulty of properly understanding the phrase *following the sun*: "How it was carried out in those days cannot unfortunately be clarified by the few suggestive words. One might assume that turning round must have been done, like the sun, from east to west, from right to left." ¹³⁾ Similarly, Professor Peter A. Boodberg renders: "in the direction of the sun's movement." ¹⁴⁾ Opposing himself to these interpretations, Mori has offered his own view that the Khagan facing east, on the felt carpet, turned round clockwise from east to south, and from south to west. ¹⁵⁾

Concerning the purpose of the clockwise turning, differing theses have been proposed by Professor Shōei Mishina and Liu Mau-tsai. According to Mishina, the new Khagan is symbolically united with the sun to be born anew as the child of the sun. ¹⁶⁾ His opinion has been accepted by Mori, ¹⁷⁾ but Liu has offered an alternative (though

10) Mikhailowski, "Shamanism in Siberia and European Russia," p. 77.

11) *Ibid.*, p. 90.

12) Liu, *Die chinesischen Nachrichten*, p. 496, n. 46.

13) *Ibid.*

14) P. A. Boodberg, "Marginalia to the Histories of the Northern Dynasties" (*Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, IV, 1939, pp. 230-83), p. 245.

15) Mori, *Kodai Toruko minzokushi kenkyū*, I, pp. 477-93, especially 486ff.

16) S. Mishina, *Shinwa to bunka kyōiki* (Kyoto, 1948), pp. 248-49.

17) Mori, "Yūboku kokka ni okeru 'ōken shinju' to yū kangaye: Tokketsu minzoku no bawai," p. 33, n. 31, and his *Yūboku kiba minzoku kokka*, p. 96.

he is not always committed to his own proposal): "The ritual has the intention of helping the new Khagan fall into trance as fast as possible." 18) We are not sure which of the two is nearer the truth, but it seems highly possible that the ritual is closely associated with the solar cult predominant among pastoral peoples of Central and North Asia. 19)

Why is it that the Khagan turns round *nine times* with the felt carpet? We suggest that nine turns symbolize the king's ascent through the nine heavenly zones, for the scenario is very closely associated with a part of the shaman's initiation ceremony. Among the Buryat of Balagansk, for example:

Zunächst wird der junge Schamane auf einer Filzmatte neunmal in der Sonnenrichtung um neun in einer Reihe aufgestellte Birken getragen, dann klettert er auf den ersten Baum zur Rechten, danach auf die acht anderen Birken, wobei er jeden Baum beim Emporklettern neunmal umkreist. 20)

Let us recapitulate: (1) the future shaman, seated on a felt carpet, is carried exactly *nine times* round the birches; (2) he turns round *in the direction of the sun's movement*; and (3) he climbs each of the birches and makes on each of them *nine turns* while climbing. Nine turns symbolize, of course, the shaman's ascent to nine heavens. 21) We are so struck by the morphological similarities between the two that we cannot think of the Khagan's making nine turns without associating it with the future shaman's nine turns round the birches on a felt carpet. Let us simply confirm the following point: The shamanic image of the Khagan has emerged once again.

Finally, on the use of the *felt carpet*. The practice of felt making has a long history in Eurasia. Berthold Laufer holds that it was restricted to this region, and that it originated among pastoral peoples

18) Liu, *Die chinesischen Nachrichten*, p. 496, n. 46.

19) Gustav Ränk, "Einige Bemerkungen über die traditionelle Solarorientierung bei den Nomadenbewohnungen Asiens" (*Ethnos*, XIV, 1949, pp. 149-59). Cf. also Mishina, *Shinwa to bunka kyōiki*, pp. 247-52; Mori, *Kodai Toruko minzokushi kenkyū*, I, pp. 485ff.

20) Uno Harva (Holmberg), *Der Baum des Lebens* (Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, ser. B, XVI, Helsinki, 1922-23), p. 139. Cf. also W. Schmidt, *Der Ursprung der Gottesidee*, X (1952), 410ff.; M. Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. 119-20.

21) Cf. Harva, *Die religiösen Vorstellungen*, p. 493.

of Central Asia, ²²⁾ possibly among Iranians. ²³⁾ His opinion has been confirmed by recent archeological findings in the Altai region. For example, the tombs at Pazyryk, in which beautiful felt carpets of different colors and designs have been found, ²⁴⁾ can be traced back as early as the middle of the first millennium B.C. ²⁵⁾

It is highly probable that the meaning of the felt carpet is eventually derived from the shaman's initiation ceremony in Central and North Asia. The essential features of the initiation ceremony among the Buryat have been summarized by Mikhailowski: ²⁶⁾ (1) the shaman anoints himself with the blood of the sacrificed kid, on the head, eyes, and ears; ²⁷⁾ (2) he is carried on a felt carpet; and (3) he climbs up the birch and, from the summit of the tent, calls upon the gods and kinsmen, the dead shamans. ²⁸⁾ Of these features, the second one calls for our special attention: The shaman is carried on a felt carpet.

According to G. N. Potanin, the most important of all the initiation rites among the Buryat is the *elevation* of the shaman. That is, the candidate is placed on a felt carpet, carried by four shamans, raised up high, and carried to the nine trees for the celestial journey. At a tree nearest him he jumps up from the felt carpet to the tree, climbing to the top where he rapidly makes three turns around the tree. He

²²⁾ B. Laufer, "The Early History of Felt" (*American Anthropologist*, XXXII, 1930, pp. 1-18), pp. 1-3, 13.

²³⁾ "All the tribes belonging to this great Iranian family were active and energetic producers of felt, and it may even well be the case that they were the initiators of the technique. Certain it is that woven rugs and carpets were first produced in their midst, and as in my estimation carpet-weaving sprang up after and as a consequence of felt rugs, it stands to reason that it was Iranians who invented the manufacture of felt." (Laufer, "The Early History of Felt," p. 9.)

²⁴⁾ Cf. Seigei I. Rudenko, *Frozen Tombs of Siberia: The Pazyryk Burials of Iron Age Horsemen*, trans. and with a preface by M. W. Thompson (London, 1970), illus. 147, 148, 149, 154, 173.

²⁵⁾ *Ibid.*, pp. 293ff.

²⁶⁾ Mikhailowski, "Shamanism in Siberia and European Russia," pp. 89-90. Cf. also Harva, *Die religiösen Vorstellungen*, pp. 487-98; Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. 115-22.

²⁷⁾ On some resemblances to certain ceremonies of the Mithraic mysteries, cf. Harva, *Der Baum des Lebens*, pp. 140ff.; *Die religiösen Vorstellungen*, pp. 496ff.; Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. 121-22.

²⁸⁾ On this symbolism of ascent, cf. Eliade, *Shamanism*.

repeats the same from one tree to the other until when he has finished he jumps down from the last tree to the felt carpet.²⁹⁾

This information is extremely interesting for several reasons: (1) the striking role played by the felt carpet; (2) the shaman's jumping from the felt carpet to the nearest tree, the fact which reminds us of the Eastern Turkic tradition that whosoever shall jump the highest up towards the tree shall be proclaimed chieftain; and (3) his making of three turns on top of the tree.

Similarly, N. N. Agapitov and M. N. Khangalov have given us the following information on the shamanic rites among the Buryat of Balagansk: The candidate, seated on a felt carpet, is carried nine times around the birches in the direction of the sun's movement. Then he climbs each of the nine trees, making nine turns while climbing each tree.³⁰⁾

Now it is certain that the felt carpet plays an essential part in the shamanic initiation ceremony. The felt carpet may be understood as the *sacred place* from which the candidate starts his heavenly journey and descends from heaven as an entirely new being, i.e. the shaman.

According to Potanin, the felt carpet alluded to by Agapitoff and Khangaloff provides the means of performing what is considered the most essential part of the ceremony. The novice is carried on it, by the four shamans mentioned, out of the *yurta* to the row of nine birches. Of the moment of his elevation on the carpet, they say *bo begde*, 'the shaman ascends.' On reaching the birches, the shaman must leap from the carpet on to one of them, which he climbs. From the top of this birch he must jump to that of the one next to it, and so on to the end of the row, whence he must return in the same manner to his starting-point, and is then again placed on the carpet. After this ceremony the new shaman begins to shamanize, to foretell the future, and to heal the sick.³¹⁾

In this sense, the felt carpet is charged with the shamanic initiatory symbolism of death and rebirth. He dies to his old earthly being, and is born anew as a supernatural being originating from heaven. This ceremonial use of the felt carpet in the shamanic initiation ceremony sheds a bright light on our understanding of the felt carpet, as it was frequently used in the enthronement ceremony among pastoral peoples of Central and North Asia. The morphological resemblances between

29) Potanin, quoted in Harva, *Der Baum des Lebens*, p. 139, and his *Die religiösen Vorstellungen*, p. 494.

30) Agapitov and Khangalov, quoted in Harva, *Die religiösen Vorstellungen*, p. 494.

31) M. A. Czaplicka, *Aboriginal Siberia* (London, 1914), p. 189, n. 1.

the shaman's felt rite and the king's felt rite of accession are so remarkable that we are inclined to believe in the shamanic origin of sacred kingship in Central and North Asia. Be that as it may, it seems certain that just as the shaman is born on the felt carpet, so the future king is born on it and becomes a supremely important medium between heaven and earth.

It is well known that the felt carpet was frequently used in the enthronement ceremony of the pastoral empires in Central and North Asia. It was, for example, used among the T'o-pa Wei (Taghbach), the Turkic or Mongolian people called Hsien-pi who established the first pastoral kingdom (the Northern Wei dynasty) in Chinese history (A.D. 386-535).³²⁾ According to the *Pei Shih*, Bk. 5, the enthronement ceremony for T'o-pa Hsiu, the tenth emperor of the Northern Wei dynasty, was celebrated on the thirteenth day of the sixth month, 528. Seven men, presumably high officials, held up (literally, "were covered by") a black felt on which the new emperor, facing west, made obeisance to heaven. Following the ceremony, the emperor proceeded into the city of Loyang where he received at the palace, in the customary Chinese fashion, the congratulations of the court.³³⁾ Laufer indicates that the ceremony is an old custom of the nomads of Central Asia,³⁴⁾ while Boodberg maintains that it can be traced back to the fifth and fourth centuries A.D., prior to the removal of the capital to Loyang in 494.³⁵⁾

In the Khitan state of Liao (907-1125),³⁶⁾ too, the enthronement ceremony had as part of its scenario the elevation of the new emperor on a felt carpet.

According to the *Liao Shih*, Bk. 49, for the ceremony an auspicious day was selected. Before this date a hall and a platform for the "fire-wood investiture" were set up. For the construction of the platform,

32) On the history of the T'o-pa Wei, cf. Grousset, *L'Empire des Steppes*, pp. 103ff.; Egami, *Kiba minzoku kokka*, pp. 116ff.

33) Boodberg, "Marginalia to the Histories of the Northern Dynasties," pp. 242, 245-46. Cf. also Laufer, "The Early History of Felt," pp. 4-5; Olschki, *The Myth of Felt*, pp. 28-29; Mori, *Yūboku kiba minzoku kokka*, p. 99.

34) Laufer, "The Early History of Felt," p. 5.

35) Boodberg, "Marginalia to the Histories of the Northern Dynasties," p. 242, n. 60.

36) On the history of the Liao dynasty, cf. Grousset, *L'Empire des Steppes*, pp. 180ff., and especially Karl A. Wittfogel and Fêng Chia-Shêng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao, 907-1125* (New York, 1949), pp. 619ff.

firewood was piled up high,³⁷⁾ logs were made into three layers, and the altar was placed on top of it. This was covered by a carpet a hundred feet long, and by square cushions decorated with dragons. The emperor then entered the "rebirth building" and performed the "rebirth ceremony."

The details of the "rebirth ceremony" are not given in the *Liao Shih*, Bk. 49, however; they are narrated in Bk. 53: The emperor enters the building and takes off his clothes and shoes. Followed by a boy, he passes thrice under the V-shaped timbers. At each passage an old midwife recites some words and strokes the emperor's body. When the boy goes through the V-shaped timbers for the seventh time, the emperor lies down by the timbers. An old man strikes the quiver and shouts: "A boy is born." Then the head shaman covers the emperor's head. The emperor stands up, takes some swaddling clothes, and receives the most auspicious name.

When he has finished, (according to Bk. 49,) the elders of the eight tribes guide him to the northeastern corner of the hall where he is invested. After worshipping the sun, he mounts a horse. The oldest men among the imperial maternal relatives are chosen to be his grooms. The emperor gallops off and falls. The grooms and followers cover him with a felt rug.³⁸⁾ When the emperor reaches an elevated place, the high officials and tribal leaders marshal the ceremonial equipment and make obeisance to him from a distance. After that, he accepts to become emperor and gives a feast for the courtiers.

The following day, the emperor comes out from the investiture hall and is escorted to the platform by the grand guardian of the imperial bodyguard. This is the firewood investiture ceremony in a strict sense. The ancestral tablets (according to the Chinese custom) are placed on the square cushions decorated with dragons. The high officials

37) The burning of firewood was originally part of the enthronement ceremony (Wittfogel and Fêng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao, 907-1125*, p. 239, n. 12). The intention was, certainly, to announce to heaven the accession to the imperial throne (*Liao Shih*, Bk. 1). In the course of time, however, "the announcement by fire was abandoned, but the pile of wood and the old name were retained." (*Op. cit.*, p. 223.) Hence it was called the "firewood investiture ceremony."

38) Wittfogel and Fêng recognize in this a survival of an old inner Asiatic practice. Cf. *History of Chinese Society: Liao, 907-1125*, p. 274, n. 189. They pay special attention to a resemblance to an Eastern Turkic ceremony, in which a new Khagan mounts a horse and is choked so severely that he almost suffocates.

then stand in a circle, each grasps the felt rug on which the emperor is seated, and raises it high while pronouncing a eulogy. ³⁹⁾

Despite some Chinese influences, the Khitan enthronement ceremony is fascinating for three reasons: (1) the rebirth ceremony; (2) the ritual of worshipping the sun; and (3) the rite of the felt carpet. The ritual of passing through the V-shaped timbers is undoubtedly a symbolic enactment of man's birth from the mother's womb, because the "rebirth ceremony" is characterized by the nude emperor, the symbolic presence of an old midwife, an old man announcing the birth of a boy, and the presentation to the emperor of swaddling clothes and the new name. With respect to worshipping of the sun, our text is so brief that we hardly understand its exact meaning, but it is probably associated with the solar cult predominant in Central and North Asia. As far as the rite of the felt carpet is concerned, we are struck by the fundamental resemblances between this Khitan ceremony and those of the T'o-pa Wei and the Eastern Turks. The basic morphological similarities between the three rites are beyond doubt: Among the T'o-pa Wei seven dignitaries hold up a black felt on which the new ruler is seated, while among the Eastern Turks high officials lift the new Khagan on a felt carpet and turn it round nine times in the direction of the sun's movement.

Similarly, the Armenian prince Hayton (= Hethum) has left us some highly valuable information on the ceremonial use of the felt carpet in the Mongolian enthronement ceremony. Judging from his familiarity with the Mongolian dynastic tradition based on his first-hand experience, there is no room to doubt that Genghis Khan in his accession was lifted on a rug of black felt supported by seven chiefs. ⁴⁰⁾

So it was that the seven chiefs mentioned above assembled the Tartar people and made them pledge obedience and bow to Canguis, and they did the same as to their natural lord.

After this, the Tartars erected a seat in the middle of them, spread out a black felt on the earth, and made Canguis sit on it. And the chiefs of

39) Wittfogel and Fêng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao, 907-1125*, pp. 273-75. Cf. also Matsuo Otagi, *Kittan kodaishi no kenkyû* (Kyoto, 1959), pp. 55-58; Mori, *Yûboku kiba minzoku kokka*, pp. 97-99.

40) Olschki, *The Myth of Felt*, pp. 22-23; Mori, *Yûboku kiba minzoku kokka*, p. 100. Laufer ("The Early History of Felt," p. 14) reports of a rug of white felt on which Genghis Khan was seated.

the seven nations lifted him with the felt, placed him on the seat, and named him Can; and kneeling, they offered him every honor and reverence, as to their lord. At this solemn ceremony which the Tartars held for their lord at this time, no one should wonder because, perchance, they know no better, or they do not have a more beautiful cloth on which to seat their lord. But at the fact that they did not want to change their first custom one can well wonder, they who have conquered so many lands and kingdoms and still retain their first custom. When they wanted to elect their lord, and I have been twice at the election of the emperor of the Tartars, and I have seen how all the Tartars assembled in a large field, placed him on a black felt who was to be their lord, and made a fine seat in the middle of them. And then the men of high positions came and those of the line of Changuis Can as well, and they lifted him on high, placed him on the seat, and then offered him every honor and reverence as to their dear and natural lord. Neither for the sovereignty nor for the riches they had conquered did they want to change their first custom.⁴¹⁾

Hayton's information became popularized, for example, in the Florence of Dante and Boccaccio through the chronicle of Giovanni Villani, a Florentine merchant and official: "Then, they gathered together and by divine inspiration made their emperor and lord a blacksmith of poor condition whose name was Canguis and who was lifted as an emperor on a poor felt; and as soon as he was made a lord he was surnamed Cane, that is, emperor in their language."⁴²⁾

It is indeed astonishing that in the middle of the nineteenth century the felt carpet of similar kind was still used in the enthronement ceremony among some pastoral peoples of Central Asia.⁴³⁾ For example, among the Kirgiz:

Wenn der Kan erwählt ist, so begeben sich die angesehensten Sultane zu ihm und theilen ihm die Wahl mit, dann setzt man ihn auf eine dünne, weisse Filzdecke, hebt ihn in die Höhe und setzt ihn wieder nieder. Haufenweise drängt sich das Volk heran und sucht ebenfalls den Kan aufzuheben und niederzusetzen. Zum Schlusse der Ceremonie wird die weisse Filzdecke, auf der der Kan gesessen, und oft ein Theil der Kleidung desselben, in kleine Stücke zerrissen und jeder der Anwesenden sucht einen kleinen Fetzen als

41) Old French text in *Recueil des historiens des croisades: Documents arméniens* 2, 148-49, quoted in Boodberg, "Marginalia to the Histories of the Northern Dynasties," pp. 242-43.

42) G. Villani, *Istorie Fiorentine*, Lib. V, cap. 29, quoted in Olschki, *The Myth of Felt*, p. 21.

43) "The survival of the custom (invariably with a white felt and in most cases with four men lifting the rug) has been observed among Turkish and Mongol tribes down to the present time." (Boodberg, "Marginalia to the Histories of the Northern Dynasties," pp. 244f.)

Erinnerungszeichen dass er bei der Wahl zugegen gewesen, mit nach Hause zu nehmen. 44)

We do not pretend to have collected all the relevant data on the use of the felt carpet in the enthronement ceremony. It is quite possible that our information will increase through further inquiry into documentary sources, 45) but the examples we have assembled are enough to show the conspicuous part the felt carpet has played in the enthronement ceremony of some pastoral peoples in Central Asia. As Professor Boodberg has beautifully put it, "practised by nomadic rulers eight or nine hundred years before Jenghis Khan, the rite must have been part of the traditional ceremony of the inauguration of a khan, and the solemnity with which it was performed by the great conquerer's descendants would indicate that it was well sanctified by tradition." 46) It is our contention that the sacred nature of the kings of the pastoral peoples in Central Asia is ultimately derived from the shaman's initiation ceremony, in which the felt carpet functions as the *sacred place* par excellence where he ascends to heaven and descends from there to earth. In Central and North Asia the shaman has long been the "specialist of the sacred" (M. Eliade), and as such his words and deeds have naturally served as the exemplary model for those of other persons, including the powerful kings.

44) Radloff, *Aus Sibirien*, I, p. 516. Cf. also Laufer, "The Early History of Felt," p. 12.

45) Some other information on the enthronement of Mongol khans is given and discussed in Boodberg, "Marginalia to the Histories of the Northern Dynasties," p. 244; Olschki, *The Myth of Felt*, pp. 24-27.

46) Boodberg, "Marginalia to the Histories of the Northern Dynasties," p. 244.